

RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY COHESION / PREVENT

Committee name	Residents' Services Select Committee
Officer reporting	Fiona Gibbs, Stronger Communities Manager
Papers with report	None
Ward	All

HEADLINES

Summary of Report

This report aims to provide an update in relation to the work being undertaken in Hillingdon to build stronger communities, promote community cohesion and manage the risk relating to extremism. It also outlines work undertaken in meeting the aims of the Government's Prevent duty, under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and the Government's counter terrorism strategy CONTEST.

The report also brings to the attention of the Committee the newly proposed Protect Duty that is currently being presented to Parliament.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Select Committee:

1. Notes activity undertaken to build stronger communities and promote community cohesion particularly in light of the needs emerging from the pandemic and current cost of living challenges.
2. Notes the activity that has been undertaken during the past year in relation to delivering against the Prevent duty.
3. Notes the implications of the impending Protect Duty.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

A. Building stronger communities

The work of the Stronger Communities team supports the Council's aim, "along with its partners, to create a strong and resilient community in Hillingdon, to counter extremism and hate in all its forms, while bringing communities together to promote cohesion and integration.

To build a strong sense of belonging and pride where all people feel valued and included, whether living, working within, or visiting the Borough.” This aim is delivered by managing and coordinating a partnership approach to building stronger communities:

Leading on the implementation of the Prevent Duty, as set out in the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015;

Supporting the local voluntary sector and community organisations, including faith groups in developing communities and community cohesion;

Maintaining and developing community engagement and reach into Hillingdon’s diverse communities as part of building stronger communities.

Programmes of activity 2022:

1. Covid 19: Community engagement, Vaccination take-up and Community Champions

The pandemic highlighted health inequalities and access to services, particularly within certain communities. This also included lack of access to information/ guidance and hesitancy in take – up of the vaccine. The team have led on identifying and reaching out to those communities across the Borough and established an action plan in partnership with health colleagues and H4All.

The programme of engagement and communication with our communities was based on two key approaches:

Firstly, establishing a strong network and database of community and faith leaders keen to support accurate health messaging out to their groups and congregations and covering the whole Borough. Officers have been able to strengthen relationships with a virtual network of some 200 organisations. Meetings are held regularly (1-2 times a month) to share the latest health messages to take back to communities and to provide insight into views and barriers regarding Covid and vaccinations and in accessing other services. Officers have endeavoured to build trust and respect through this engagement, in order to have relationships in place that can be drawn upon to support further work. Feedback has also identified the need to work through people trusted in communities rather than through “official” agencies. These insights have enabled officers to tailor messaging, communications and activities to respond to community feedback and concerns and issues.

The second part of the programme has identified a number of volunteers, willing to dedicate time to training and activity to become Community Champions. In partnership with H4All, 70 champions have completed training and signed up to working with the Council on various initiatives in their communities. The Community Champions programme has provided officers with the opportunity to have a more coordinated and joined up approach to building relationships with “grass root” organisations and individuals that have not traditionally worked with statutory bodies. This has been either through lack of trust or other barriers such as language or access. It is a continuous and ongoing process to gain trust and build good relations. The Community Champions have:

- Disseminated information and messages around COVID-19 (online and face to face) both

to individuals and to groups, e.g., through community conversations, participating in activity/support groups. This has often involved having difficult conversations.

- Fed back community insight and intelligence / resident views to shape engagement responses with diverse local communities.
- Signposted to relevant services, e.g. local food banks and distribution networks, H4All Health and Wellbeing Service.
- Coordinated a series of 'vaccine community conversations' via Zoom with local GPs and other partners.
- Assisted with promotion, pre-engagement and support for community and GP-based vaccine pop-ups and vaccine bus.

Utilising the Council youth bus as a pop-up clinic has enabled engagement and outreach in targeted localities. Whilst numbers are not large, officers were able to reach those communities where there has been lower take up. Providing the opportunity to engage with the local community and enable access to vaccinations, instantly and on their doorstep, has enabled those who may not have been able to, to access the vaccine. It has also provided insight into some of the needs and hesitations in communities to inform future planning and engagement.

All the above actions have been developed jointly with the Council's local integrated care partnership: Hillingdon Health and Care Partners (HHCP) and through H4All - a consortium of key charities in the Borough (and HHCP member).

As winter approaches, officers continue to work with partners in co-ordinating community engagement activity to promote winter wellness, Covid vaccination booster and flu programmes, polio and childhood immunisations and address current cost of living pressures, particularly reaching out to communities and parts of the Borough where there is greatest need and inequity identified.

2. Tackling hate and extremism programme

This project has been funded through the LCPF (MOPAC) with the aim of tackling hate and extremism. Through the recruitment and training of Hate crime Upstanders (HCU), the project aims to raise awareness and greater understanding of hate crime and extremism and equip those working within local communities to be better able to report, support and challenge hate crime and extremism.

Target Audience:

The training is open to everyone who lives or works in Hillingdon. Initially third sector, community, voluntary and faith groups and schools were targeted. Officers wanted to embed their training with those people who work in organisations reflecting the Hate Crime Strands. What has been seen in each cohort is a growth in numbers with some organisations acknowledging that just having one member of staff trained was not sufficient; it was critical all staff knew how to identify

Hate crime, how to report it and how to support those affected by it.

In the past year officers have widened the programme to Council staff and other partner organisations. The library service being an example.

The programme is passionate about bringing change and having a strong belief that individuals connected within their communities can bring about change given the right support. Therefore, officers feel it is their mission to support the Hate Crime Upstanders to be the best that they can be and manage the challenges that Hate crime can bring in a positive and productive manner.

This programme takes the approach of recognising the value of individuals within their communities and organisations and offers training so that they are confident enough to provide help and support to those who experience hate and prejudice.

The team delivers a 4-week programme (Online) which covers:

- Introduction to hate incidents and crime
- Hidden bias and prejudice
- Various strands of hate crime
- Local and national picture of hate crime
- Intersectionality and hate crime
- Police's perspective of hate crime
- Barriers to reporting
- Report and Support groups/ platforms

The programme also involves a training session on the emerging trends around Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT)

During the first two years of the programme delivered so far, 124 individuals from local community groups, voluntary organisations, partner agencies and council services have been recruited to act as Hate Crime upstanders. They are trained and equipped to raise awareness of hate crime, support victims of hate crime from within their community organisations, encourage reporting of hate crime and work collaboratively with the Council and police. Due to the success and feedback from those that have participated and the positive working relationship this has built, officers aim to continue to build on the network to better inform local understanding of hate crime and how current events might be impacting communities.

Feedback from participants:

"I left the training feeling proud to be Black, British, and a woman. Something I hadn't given much thought up until the training. It also widened my outlook on other people's background and enhanced my compassion to understand others who may have backgrounds that I have little to no knowledge of" (MD from Brilliant Parents).

"In an ever-changing world where hate crime does not disappear but takes a different form and moves to different platforms, the fight and challenges against hate crime is ongoing and people should not let their guard down. That's why this course is important. Recognise the signs of hate crime, challenge it or/and report it." (H from West London Somalilanders).

“This is a very good training to understand hate crime, its different manifestations, the difference between an incident and actual crime, but most importantly a wake-up call regarding hidden bias and an appeal to be an active member of change. The sessions really show how widespread and damaging is hate crime, but also encourage you to reflect on yourself, your community and the actions you need to take to create a fair and respectful society. We must be informed and ready to challenge these destructive and harmful behaviours” (Anonymous).

“Carla & Rehman are fantastic ambassadors and excellent presenters. They very quickly and easily make you feel at ease and therefore allow participants to openly share their views and comments. I’d like to commend her and Rehman and all the other guest speakers for a good professional awareness training programme that I will now be able to take into my role” (WP from AGEUK Hillingdon).

“I think everyone should attend this training” (JS from Carers Trust Hillingdon).

3. Work with specific groups

Women’s groups

Working alongside Hillingdon’s Women in the Community Network (a network of local groups and organisations) and Hillingdon Women’s Centre, officers deliver an annual series of events leading up to and including International Women’s Day.

Officers support monthly meetings for the network in addressing gender-based issues, promoting Gender Equality, hosting events to foster good relations (particularly across diverse communities) to improve integration and sense of inclusion and highlight the contribution women make.

International Women’s Day 2022 was hosted by the Beck Theatre – 156 people attended and 55 people attended virtually with over 20 local organisations providing advice and information. There was 100% positive feedback from the event with shared words of “Empowered, Strong, Independent and Equal” all being a common theme of how participants felt after the day.

Faith groups

Officers continue to work closely with faith communities and leaders across the Borough to build interfaith relations. Coming out of the pandemic, local faith leaders have identified the importance of coming together and Hillingdon interfaith network is relaunching this year as Hillingdon interfaith community, with a new committee and is running a series of events to mark interfaith week in November.

Afghan and Ukrainian refugees

Working with partners and local community groups and voluntary organisations officers have been able to utilise connections and relationships to support services and communities managing the offers of help and support from residents and local groups as well as ensuring that services provided were able to understand needs and respond.

B. Prevent Duty and Channel

1. Background

PREVENT is a key part of the Government's CONTEST strategy; its aim is to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

The Prevent Strategy objectives are to:

- Tackle the causes of radicalisation and respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism.
- Safeguard and support those most at risk of radicalisation through early intervention, identifying them and offering support.
- Enable those who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate.

Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015

Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (the Act) places a duty on certain bodies ("specified authorities" listed in Schedule 6 to the Act), in the exercise of their functions, to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism" (Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales 2015). Hillingdon remains a non-priority Borough and as such receives no funding from Government to deliver the Prevent Duty and related activity.

2. Summary of current threats/priorities

Key themes

The key themes in Hillingdon in the past twelve months have largely been related to the influence of right-wing extremism and a level of mixed/unclear ideologies, including incel traits. We continue to see an increasing number of referrals where the individual also has a diagnosis of ASD and or mental health needs.

Hillingdon continues to experience a steady stream of referrals being made relating to vulnerable individuals, but there remains little evidence of organised activity in the Borough.

Social media influence, gaming, Chat App activity / sharing continue to feature in some form or another in the majority of Prevent referrals. In most cases the extremist content being shared cannot be attributed to any specific group or organisation but is being used to proliferate concerning, or in some cases extremist, content. Social media and on-line activity are often carried out anonymously and are an easily accessed environment for those with concerning beliefs or those looking for supporting views.

Channel and Prevent referral numbers had been slightly lower over the past 12 months due to Covid, whilst we saw a small uplift at the beginning of the year – referral numbers have now reduced quite significantly. However, this is also being experienced across London, so not just in Hillingdon. Partners and agencies still seek advice on concerns, but the concerns have been

outside of the scope of Channel. This has highlighted a gap in offering support to individuals who might be expressing unpalatable views or behaviours – but is not extremism.

Heathrow Airport

Hillingdon Borough acts as the first responding authority should there be safeguarding support required relating to individuals of concern travelling through Heathrow airport and/or potentially returning from areas of concern.

There have been no cases arriving at the airport in the past 12 months, mainly due to travel restrictions and Covid. However, now restrictions have been lifted this may change; this has not been seen as yet.

A number of hotels around the airport facilities are being utilised for temporary accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers and were also used for quarantining travellers. Alongside this, 15 hotels were utilised for quarantining the arrivals from Afghanistan. Low level local tensions have been experienced around the use of these hotels, but this has not attracted any significant extremist influenced activity or organised protests.

3. Key areas of work

i) The emergence of the growth of support for right wing extremism.

Officers have ensured through staff training that agencies are aware of the potential influence and importance of safeguarding those who might be at risk from these ideologies.

ii) Support to schools and further and higher education

Officers are working with schools to raise awareness through staff training in order to identify those who might be vulnerable and to make the relevant referrals. Building resilience is also key, and officers have introduced a programme working with young people to tackle hate and extremism and stay safe online.

iii) Vulnerability of those with a learning disability/autism and mental health needs

Trends emerging from local referrals received during the past year, have highlighted an increase in vulnerability of those with a learning disability / on the autistic spectrum alongside those with mental health needs. Officers are working closely with local services including voluntary sector to ensure appropriate support is in place.

iv) Safeguarding procedures and referral pathways

Channel is the multi-agency process for the management of cases relating to vulnerability to radicalisation and support of terrorism. The Channel panel in Hillingdon meets monthly and is currently Chaired by the Council's Stronger Communities Manager (Prevent lead) and the deputy Chair is a Senior Manager from Children's services. Core members include social care, NHS, mental health services, police with other agencies attending as required.

In 2021 Hillingdon were part of the pilot to test a new national referral form and process in collaboration with SO15. This has now been adopted as the agreed referrals process for all agencies in Hillingdon.

The guidance for the management of Channel was updated in November 2020. As part of the update, an annual assurance statement is requested from local authorities detailing the named officers designated by the CEO and to confirm suitable arrangements are in place to meet requirements set out in the guidance. Any changes must be notified to the Home Office. The first of these statements was submitted in April 2021.

In October 2021 the safeguarding board undertook a quality assurance audit of Channel with partners and recommendations have been presented to the Prevent Partnership board. The outcome of the review concluded that:

Overall, the feedback in respect of safeguarding practice at Channel Panel is positive. The view across the Safeguarding Partnership was that the Channel arrangements in Hillingdon can be considered of high quality due to the approach of shared and equal responsibility for safeguarding. There were some recommendations in relation to reviewing and updating training available to front line staff and across partners to ensure consistency. This has been included in the Prevent action plan for 2022/23. There were also gaps in terms of involvement from health – particularly in relation to children. This has now been resolved and representation on Channel panel and Prevent Partnership is now in place.

The second return submitted in April 2022 showed all areas as green.

v) Training for staff

The Council provides support to local partners and agencies in delivering training and has provided training to more than 5000 staff across the Borough from within the Council, education (including schools, FE&HE), health, voluntary and other settings. This programme is ongoing and promotion of Home Office e-learning modules, together with face to face training, are provided across our partnership working. The Channel Chair and Deputy Chair and panel members also undertake regular training provided by the Home Office.

vi) Building resilience

Through the work of the Stronger Communities Team, a broader approach has been established to promote community involvement, integration, and inclusion, that underpins the building of stronger and more resilient communities. Officers continue to deliver our MOPAC (Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime) funded programme in collaboration with police, schools, the college, the University and community, aimed at tackling hate crime and extremism.

One of the most important aspects of Prevent, is equipping individuals to be able to question, challenge, develop critical thinking skills, gain understanding and respect for others, whilst developing their own sense of identity, belonging and aspirations. This underpins, undermines, and helps build resilience to the extremists' message - which aims to divide communities and promote intolerance and hate. Workshops have been delivered in schools with pupils discussing topics relating to promoting equality and diversity, challenging discrimination, and tackling hate.

Pupils through their discussions have been able to demonstrate awareness of diversity in Britain, and understanding of core values including unity, respect, democracy, how to report concerns and more, leading to increased resilience and cohesion.

In working with our local communities, the programme has also included the recruitment and training of 124 Hate Crime Upstanders as previously mentioned.

4. Home Office developments

i) Prioritisation and Regionalisation

The Home Office continues to monitor and review the Prevent Duty and delivery and has recently written to all Local Authority Chief Executives outlining current direction of travel. This includes the proposal to make better use of resources available and to support not just priority areas but also non-priority areas to deliver more effectively. This will be via a regionalised rather than individual authority approach. Finer details for London are still to be agreed. Discussions are being held with the London Prevent Board.

As a non-priority Borough currently, this new approach could mean that we have access to more resources to support delivery of the duty. However, Governance and priority setting for each area needs to be considered and it is unclear at the moment how this would work.

ii) Prevent review

The independent review of Prevent has now concluded, and whilst there has been some reporting in the press, officers are still awaiting the publication of the report and Government response.

iii) Support for schools and educational establishments

Funded authorities currently have designated Prevent Education Officer posts, whereas non - priority areas do not have this support. The DfE are currently undertaking a review of support for education sectors to ensure that non-priority areas have access to support and input – including training for schools and other education settings.

iv) Funding for projects in non- priority areas

In recognition of the challenge faced by non-priority boroughs to resource activity to address local concerns, The Home Office has recently allocated funding for non-priority boroughs so that they can bid for resources to deliver projects to tackle local risks/ priorities.

As part of the Council's action plan, officers have highlighted the need to enable young people with special needs to have greater awareness and to keep themselves safe online. The aim is to approach the Home Office with an application to fund a project to deliver workshops for young people and to equip staff with the knowledge and ability to address extremist narratives.

C. Protect Duty

In response to terrorist attacks and most notably the Manchester arena bombing, from 26

February to 2 July 2021 the Government undertook a consultation on a proposed Protect duty. There is currently no legislative requirement for organisations to consider or employ security measures at the vast majority of public places. Many organisations choose to implement their own security measures. These range from the consideration of risk assessments leading to a range of emergency plans and procedures being in place, undertaking staff training and awareness raising, and employing security systems, processes and measures to mitigate threats. The Protect Duty has been championed by victims' groups, including the Martyn's Law campaign, which was established by Figen Murray following the tragic loss of her son, Martyn, in the Manchester Arena attack in 2017.

2,755 responses were received from a variety of organisations, sectors and campaigners, with the majority supporting the Government's proposals to introduce stronger measures, including a legal requirement for some public places to ensure preparedness for, and protection from, terrorist attacks.

The purpose of the consultation was to consult private and public sector partners as to how appropriate considerations of security could take place, leading to proportionate security measures at Publicly Accessible Locations, and what support would be required from Government.

Publicly Accessible Location (PAL) is defined as any place to which the public or any section of the public has access, on payment or otherwise, as of right or by virtue of express or implied permission. For clarity, public places/venues are permanent buildings (e.g. entertainment and sports venues) or temporary event locations (such as outdoor festivals) where there is a defined boundary and open access to the public. Public spaces are open public locations, which usually have no clear boundaries or well-defined entrances / exit points (e.g. city centre squares, bridges or busy thoroughfares, parks, and beaches).

The aim of the proposed legislation will be to improve security at publicly accessible locations. The duty may require organisations to:

- Understand the range of terror threats, and likely attack methodologies.
- Assess the risk to individual site(s).
- Plan, train, and exercise organisational responses to an incident.

Local authorities are likely to be expected to take a leadership role in their areas, very much as they currently do with the Prevent duty.

The Government is currently developing policy, which would form the basis for legislative proposals. The latest update provided by the Homeland Security Group on 03 August 2022 is as follows:

“The Government committed in the Queens Speech to take forward a Protect Duty Bill in this parliamentary session. Work on the Duty proposals is progressing at pace, following analysis of consultation responses. Whilst Protect Duty legislation is not yet in effect, we would encourage organisations to refer to existing guidance that is available through ProtectUK and CPNI; to support the implementation of good security practices. Legislative proposals will be taken forward when Parliamentary time allows. More detail on what the legislation will entail will be made

available in due course”.

Current situation in Hillingdon

Currently the MPS has identified designated CT advisors who link in with their local authorities and provide advice, guidance and briefings on high-risk locations and events. They also provide briefings to the Chief Executive on an annual basis, which have been attended by the Council’s Prevent lead. The Council’s Prevent lead and Emergency planning Manager have been points of contact and supported the delivery/ facilitation of training sessions for staff and partners.

Officers have utilised some of these training packages for staff including the ACT training materials and hosted such sessions for partner agencies to attend too. This is currently being reviewed to provide an updated offer for 2022/2023.

As the Protect duty is soon to be presented to Parliament, the duty will have implications for partnership working moving forward.

Financial implications

Hillingdon is a non-priority Borough for Prevent and as such receives no external funding from the Home Office to deliver against the Prevent duty.

Legal implications

It is a requirement of local authorities to deliver against the Government’s Prevent duty, under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and the Government’s counter terrorism strategy CONTEST.

If cases are not managed effectively, then individuals may become involved in undertaking an act of violent extremism or terrorism causing harm to themselves and the wider community. This also implies a reputational risk for the organisation.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.